# Parliament launches inquiry into social media misinformation on suncream risks



A growing movement of anti-suncream sentiment on social media has spurred a parliamentary inquiry aimed at addressing the alarming spread of misinformation propagated by influencers on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. As concerns mount over the promotion of potentially harmful tanning products and baseless conspiracy theories about sun protection, members of Parliament are calling for stricter regulations to protect public health.

The inquiry is set to scrutinise influencers who engage in paid promotions for tanning oils and lotions, often failing to disclose the associated health risks. Alarmingly, some TikTok personalities have pushed narratives that equate sun protection with "rubbing cancer into your skin." Such rhetoric has gained traction, leading to an increase in DIY suncream recipes that experts warn may inadequately shield users from harmful UV rays.

Labour MP Carolyn Harris, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Beauty and Wellbeing, emphasised the urgency of educating the public about the dangers of ultraviolet (UV) exposure. She stated, “It is vital that the public understands the dangers of UV, and the risks that they are taking to get a tan.” Harris also articulated the need for a comprehensive examination of the potential impact of overexposure to sunlight and the measures needed to avert a public health crisis.

In alignment with this inquiry, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has ramped up its oversight of misleading beauty advertisements and health claims propagated through social media. Recent actions by the ASA include banning several ads promoting Botox and other prescription-only medicines, reflecting a broader commitment to consumer safety amidst a surge in public complaints. Victoria Brownlie of the British Beauty Council called for sustained efforts to maintain rigorous consumer safety standards, underlining that misinformation can have dire consequences for public perception of health products.

Dermatologists have responded by countering trending claims about sunscreen’s supposed toxicity. Dr. Heather Rogers warns that misinformation can escalate risks of skin cancer and premature ageing. The unsettling trend has also found resonance in surveys showing a considerable percentage of younger individuals expressing scepticism regarding sunscreen's efficacy. Experts advocate for the use of mineral sunscreens, such as zinc oxide, citing their effectiveness as a physical barrier against UV radiation. They stress that regular sunscreen use can significantly decrease the risk of developing skin cancer by 40 to 50%.

Recent regulatory actions illuminate a pressing need for clarity in health and beauty marketing. The ASA's scrutiny of advertisements—including those for well-known brands like Boots—revealed that some were misleading regarding the necessity of sun protection. Such decisions signal an increased expectation for clear and responsible messaging, particularly in a landscape where public trust is fragile and health behaviours are increasingly influenced by social media narratives.

Faced with this challenging environment, the inquiry led by Parliament aims not only to address misleading advertising but also to explore avenues for public education. It seeks to implement robust health warnings on products and sunbeds, as well as advocate for reduced tax burdens on sunscreen prices, promoting accessibility.

As this matter unfolds, it remains critical for health professionals to combat misinformation on platforms filled with dubious claims. Recent research suggests that health practitioners are actively engaging in debunking false health narratives by producing evidence-based content, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping healthier public perceptions. The dual approach of regulatory oversight and proactive public education will be vital in counteracting the consequences of an influential but often misinformed social media landscape.

**Reference Map**

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraph 4
3. Paragraph 3
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 6
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14722893/MPs-online-personalities-anti-suncream-misinformation-TikTok.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/may/07/advertising-watchdog-cracks-down-on-misleading-health-and-beauty-claims> - The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has intensified its scrutiny of beauty clinics and aesthetic product manufacturers, responding to a surge in complaints about misleading advertisements on social media and TV. The ASA has banned several ads promoting Botox and other prescription-only medicines, emphasizing the need for responsible advertising to protect consumers' mental health and self-esteem. Victoria Brownlie of the British Beauty Council stressed the importance of upholding consumer safety standards and adhering to advertising regulations.
3. <https://health.wusf.usf.edu/npr-health/2024-06-17/some-tiktok-influencers-are-maligning-sunscreen-heres-what-to-know-about-the-claims> - Some TikTok influencers are spreading misinformation about sunscreen, claiming it is toxic and causes cancer. Dermatologists, including Dr. Heather Rogers, warn that such claims are unfounded and can lead to increased skin cancer risk and premature aging. Surveys indicate that a significant number of younger Americans doubt sunscreen's safety, highlighting the need for accurate information. Experts recommend using mineral sunscreens like zinc oxide as a physical barrier to UV rays and emphasize the importance of daily sunscreen use to reduce skin cancer risk by 40 to 50%.
4. <https://www.finnegan.com/en/insights/blogs/ad-law-buzz-blog/uk-advertising-regulators-ruling-shines-a-light-on-sun-protection-disclaimers.html> - The UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ruled that Boots' advertisement for No7 Future Renew Serum breached advertising codes by potentially misleading consumers about the necessity of sun protection. The ad's language could lead viewers to underestimate the importance of sunscreen, and the disclaimers provided were not sufficiently prominent. This decision underscores the need for clear and responsible messaging in health and beauty marketing, especially concerning sun protection.
5. <https://www.marketingweek.com/asa-rules-boots-suncream-ad-could-harm-childrens-health/> - The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) criticized Boots' television advertisement for Soltan suncream, stating it could mislead consumers into believing that sun protection alone is sufficient for children's safety. The ad depicted children mimicking adults by overexposing themselves to the sun, potentially encouraging unsafe sun behavior. The ASA emphasized the importance of clear messaging to prevent harm to children's health and prevent misleading advertising practices.
6. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2412.04999> - A study titled 'Debunk-It-Yourself': Health Professionals' Strategies for Responding to Misinformation on TikTok explores how health professionals are actively countering misinformation on TikTok. The research highlights that these professionals are creating and sharing videos to debunk false health claims, focusing on topics like nutrition and mental health. The study emphasizes the importance of evidence-based responses to combat the spread of health misinformation on social media platforms.
7. <https://www.mondaq.com/uk/advertising-marketing-branding/1544104/uk-advertising-regulators-ruling-shines-a-light-on-sun-protection-disclaimers> - The UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ruled that Boots' advertisement for No7 Future Renew Serum breached advertising codes by potentially misleading consumers about the necessity of sun protection. The ad's language could lead viewers to underestimate the importance of sunscreen, and the disclaimers provided were not sufficiently prominent. This decision underscores the need for clear and responsible messaging in health and beauty marketing, especially concerning sun protection.